

Testimony by
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**Improving Conservation Programs in the Farm Bill by Prioritizing Hardwood
Regeneration and Sustainable Management**

Mr. Chairman, my name is Paul Houghland, and I thank you for the opportunity to share our views with you today. I come before you to discuss a unique opportunity to increase the conservation value of the Farm Bill, while further expanding our greatest naturally renewable resource—hardwood forests.

The National Hardwood Lumber Association, and the more than 1,500 mostly small, family-owned U.S. businesses that we represent, believe that there is no better conservation activity than the regeneration and sustainable management of hardwood forests. And we are excited that, with only slight modifications to the existing Farm Bill, significant expansion of hardwood forests and all their inherent environmental benefits can be a reality.

America's Hardwood Forests

America's hardwood forests are beautiful, functional, diverse and sustainable. They provide clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife, diverse recreation and valuable products—like furniture, flooring, and musical instruments—that are among the most functional and treasured

items in the world. And they provide all this across a relatively long time frame and at great benefit to society.

Yet, there are still millions of acres of marginal crop and pastureland that could once again support economically valuable and environmentally friendly hardwood forests. And there are millions of additional acres of existing forestland that are regularly converted to non-hardwood uses, often simply because landowners cannot justify the long-term investment—often in excess of 50 years—required for proper, sustainable hardwood management. Unfortunately, programs under the existing Conservation Title of the Farm Bill do not provide landowners with the assistance they need to make such a long-term commitment.

Hardwood Priorities in the Farm Bill

Reauthorization of the Farm Bill provides a unique opportunity to improve existing conservation programs by prioritizing hardwood regeneration and management. Many existing programs in the Farm Bill, such as the popular Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), have been successful in helping landowners pursue valuable conservation practices, but lack sufficient measures to assist landowners who would otherwise be willing to make long-term commitments to sustainable hardwood management. Since properly managed hardwood forest offer the highest possible conservation value on most lands enrolled in these programs, hardwood regeneration should receive the highest of priorities under these programs.

In order to provide the assistance landowners will need to commit to long-term investments in hardwood forests, we believe the new Farm Bill must include the changes outlined in the following pages.

1. Improve Existing Conservation Programs

Increasing regeneration and sustainable management of hardwood forests on marginal crop and pastureland and other sensitive land can best be accomplished by expanding, prioritizing and emphasizing hardwood regeneration under existing programs, such as CRP, EQIP, and WHIP. By simply assigning the highest values to lands that are available for hardwood plantings, and providing contracts of sufficient length to overcome the long growth cycle of hardwoods, the increase in hardwood plantings under these programs would increase significantly.

Specifically, we recommend the following:

- Provide 30-year contracts for hardwood plantings under existing programs, such as the CRP, EQIP and WHIP (similar to the successful 30 year program under the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP));
- Under the CRP, set a minimum level of 25% of all future acres enrolled in hardwood states to be planted in hardwood annually on state-by-state basis;
- Assign highest priority (i.e., award more points) to all hardwood plantings;
- Provide continuous sign-up for hardwood plantings (similar to riparian buffer and filter strip programs);
- Allow whole field inclusions for hardwood plantings;
- Accept marginal pastureland for hardwood plantings without cropping history;
- Provide bonus payments for hardwood (similar to current continuous CRP).

2. Improving Assistance for Hardwood in FIP

Increasing regeneration and sustainable management of hardwood forests on existing forestland could be achieved by offering landowners hardwood-specific assistance under the existing Forestry Incentives Program (FIP). We appreciate the proposed mandatory funding of FIP, however, we do recommend the amount of funding be increased above the proposed \$10 million annually.

We look forward to working with this Committee to determine funding sufficient to expand forestry practices available for cost-share assistance. From initial planting to intermediate treatments and timber stand improvements, all aspects of sustainable hardwood forestry require significant commitments from landowners, and can only be achieved with cost-share assistance throughout the entire process.

Conclusion

The National Hardwood Lumber Association believes that these proposed changes to the new Farm Bill represent an opportunity to significantly improve the conservation value of the Farm Bill by increasing diversity of our nation's forest landscape and further promoting the sustainability of our greatest naturally renewable resource—hardwood forests. To that end, NHLA is actively seeking support for the above modifications to the Farm Bill.

The NHLA has been serving the hardwood industry since 1898, and currently represents member companies who directly employ more than 200,000 workers and own, manage or procure raw materials on more than 100 million acres in the United States.